

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L   SOFIA 000933

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/25/2015

TAGS: [MARR](#) [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [BU](#)

SUBJECT: TOP GENERAL DISCUSSES WAY AHEAD FOR BULGARIAN  
MILITARY IN THE COMING YEAR

REF: (A) 04 SOFIA 2016 (B) SOFIA 357 (C) 04 SOFIA 593

Classified By: Ambassador James Pardew, reasons, 1.4(B) and (D).

1. (C) SUMMARY: On the eve of his renewed mandate, Bulgarian Chief of the General Staff (CHOD) General Nikolai Kolev gave us an overview of the direction of the Bulgarian Armed Forces for the next calendar year during a meeting on May 16. Kolev sees Bulgaria as a strategic partner of the U.S., with a small, but capable, military. Kolev also outlined large military modernization projects, which the General Staff continues to support even though the GOB does not have funds to cover. He stated that the military firmly supports the concept of U.S. bases in Bulgaria and expressed regret over the GOB's decision to end the country's military involvement in Iraq at the end of 2005. END SUMMARY

-----  
MOD VS. GENERAL STAFF  
-----

2. (C) The Ministry of Defense (MOD) and the General Staff have battled privately and publicly during the past three years over resources and legal issues. Kolev explained that numerous laws constrain his ability to manage the military. The CHOD is now able to deploy selected units out of country, without soliciting volunteers from across the Armed Forces, but can not direct the deployment of soldiers without them first volunteering. He said Bulgaria was unable to quickly fulfill NATO's request to send five instructors to Iraq to train local security forces because no one volunteered, and legally the CHOD could not direct soldiers to go on the mission (ref B). In order to fill these training positions, Bulgaria's next troop rotation in Iraq, BULCON V, will include 10 officers and NCOs whose sole task during their deployment will be to train one Iraqi security force battalion.

-----  
IRAQ: DISAPPOINTED AT THE GOB DECISION TO WITHDRAW  
-----

3. (C) Kolev expressed to us that he is disappointed at the GOB's political decision to withdraw the Bulgarian battalion from Iraq at year's end. He emphasized that this deployment has provided invaluable military experience and advanced the development of Bulgaria's military. Kolev added that last month he proposed to the MOD an alternate means of maintaining a military presence in Iraq, and suggested that Bulgaria send a company of approximately 120 personnel as force protection for the United Nations. This proposal, however, was never addressed. Kolev hopes that the next government will re-consider Bulgarian military contributions to the Coalition in Iraq.

-----  
AFGHANISTAN: READY TO ENGAGE SEEBRIG  
-----

4. (C) Kolev stated that Bulgaria has increased its presence in Afghanistan. He also proposed to deploy HQ SEEBRIG, which comes under Bulgarian command on 1 July 2005, to provide the command element of ISAF. He said this idea would have to be first considered by the Council of Ministers in November. He does not see much of a future for SEEBRIG if the unit does not deploy operationally soon.

5. (C) Kolev said that Bulgaria has a clear understanding of the responsibilities involved in assuming control of Kabul airport in August 2006 and has already begun its training program. He anticipated 120 people will be needed to run the airport and another 300 for force protection. Should no other nation volunteer forces for this NATO operation, he claimed Bulgaria would provide them.

-----  
MODERNIZATION: STILL CHAMPAGNE DREAMS AND BEER BUDGET  
-----

6. (C) Kolev acknowledged political sensitivities regarding U.S. and European companies bidding for future military modernization contracts, especially in light of Bulgaria's anticipated EU membership in 2007. He added that such projects are being directed to maintain a "balance" between

U.S. and EU interests. He claimed Bulgaria has submitted through NATO channels a request for infrastructure funding support for the following items: Bezmer, Graf Ignatievo and Cheshigorovo air bases, Atya (Burgas) naval base, and a

naval surveillance operations center. The air bases and naval base are all areas that the USG has interest in placing forward operating sites.

17. (C) Current major modernization projects high on the his list were purchasing new transpQ aircraft, overhauling Bulgaria's aging MIG-29s and perhaps purchasing new multirole fighter jets. Kolev said he is pressing the MOD to complete the contract for eight C-27J aircraft, but the Ministry of Finance has yet to agree. Bulgaria is also seeking to overhaul 10 MIG-29s to extend their life another five or six years. Kolev expressed his preference that the next Bulgarian airframe be a U.S. multirole fighter, and emphasized in detail his distinct preference for F-18s over F-16s. However, he did not address the financial means by which Bulgaria could purchase such aircraft (ref A).

-----  
BLACK SEA  
-----

18. (c) The Black Sea is one of Kolev,s priorities due to the problems of illegal trafficking, potential use by terrorists, and the future shipment of Caspian Sea oil. When Bulgaria became a NATO member, Kolev said he proposed to his Turkish and Romanian colleagues that they combine efforts to secure the Black Sea. However, he characterized Turkey as trying to dominate this effort rather than cooperate. For example, Kolev claims when he suggested rotating command and control of submarines, Turkey insisted on maintaining permanent command of these assets.

19. (C) The Bulgarian military has four major modernization projects associated with the Black Sea - building a Naval Surveillance Operations Center (NSOC), plus purchases of submarines, corvettes, and frigates. Kolev CHOD wants the NSOC to be a joint Bulgarian and U.S. project because this will provide the U.S. with an alternative to Turkish surveillance of the Black Sea. But despite Bulgaria's Strategic Defense Review findings and funding constraints, Kolev intends to maintain a submarine capability in the Black Sea (ref C). He also stated that if Bulgaria chooses a German company competing for an estimated 500 million euro corvette contract, the German government has promised to donate two small submarines to Bulgaria. Bulgaria has already agreed to purchase a 2.5 ton Belgian frigate that should be fully operational next year.

-----  
COMMENT  
-----

110. (C) This was an open and frank discussion in which Kolev clearly wanted to lay out the road ahead for the Bulgarian Armed Forces during the next and last year of his leadership mandatQHowever, he failed to address the financial means for Bulgarian to carry out its ambitious military modernization program. Being close to the Bulgarian Socialist Party, which is set to be the largest party in parliament after the coming June elections, Kolev is positioned to continue to push for his agenda with the MOD.